

## BACKGROUND

- The acute and chronic consequences of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection are major health problems.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates **200,000-300,000** new HBV infections occur each year in the U.S.
- Approximately **1-1.25 million** persons have **chronic HBV** in the U.S. and are potentially infectious to others.
- Many chronically infected persons are at risk of long-term sequelae such as **chronic liver disease** and **liver cancer**. Each year, approximately **4,000-5,000** of these persons die from **chronic liver disease**.
- At least **50%** of persons who become infected have no symptoms and may not know they have it and yet may be able to infect others. Even if people have symptoms, unless they have jaundice, the symptoms are flu-like (fatigue, abdominal pain, joint pain, and loss of appetite).
- Of the approximately four million births in the U.S. each year, an estimated **19,000** occur to HBV-infected women. Unless these infants receive appropriate post-exposure prophylaxis, transmission of HBV from their mothers results in up to **90%** of these infants becoming infected; of those infected, **90%** will become **chronic carriers**. Up to **25%** of the infants who become chronically infected will die from **primary hepatocellular carcinoma** or **cirrhosis** of the liver, usually as adults.
- Immunization with hepatitis B vaccine is the most effective way to prevent HBV infection. **Perinatal transmission** of HBV can usually be prevented if HBsAg-positive pregnant women are *identified* and their infants receive appropriate post-exposure prophylaxis, which consists of hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) *and* hepatitis B vaccine, shortly after birth, followed by additional doses of vaccine at 1-2 months and 6 months of age for full protection. CDC recommends testing all pregnant women for HBV early in each pregnancy. Once a person is infected with HBV, hepatitis B vaccine will not help him/her.
- In late 1989, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) received grant funds from CDC to establish a perinatal hepatitis B prevention program. Such a program exists in all states and several U.S. territories.